

**Opening Statement
Chairman Mark Souder**

**“How Can the Federal Government Support Local and State Initiatives to
Protect Citizens and Communities Against Drug-Related Violence and
Witness Intimidation?”**

**Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy,
and Human Resources
Committee on Government Reform**

May 2, 2005

Good morning. It is a real pleasure to be in Baltimore again, here in the district of our distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Cummings. Today, however, we are revisiting a very tragic and serious problem, namely the problem of protecting law-abiding citizens from the domestic terrorism of criminal intimidation.

During the last Congress, Mr. Cummings and I held a hearing right here in Baltimore in response to the horrifying murder in 2002 of the Dawson family. We are here again to consider how the federal government can best work with cities and state and local governments to support and protect brave individuals like the murdered Angela Dawson who are willing to stand up in their communities against drug dealing and drug violence.

In Baltimore, the pain of drug abuse is especially felt. There were nearly 500 drug-induced or drug-related deaths in 2001 – approximately 10 percent of all deaths in the area. Drug dealers have taken over many parts of the city, making law-abiding citizens virtual prisoners in their own homes. In the face of this threat, many citizens and families have stepped forward to try to take back their neighborhoods from the dealers and gangs – often at great personal risk.

The Dawson family is the most poignant reminder. Angela Dawson lived in Baltimore with her husband, Carnell, and their five young children. In an effort to rid her street of drug dealers, she repeatedly called 911, reporting suspicious activity to the police. Her efforts came at a terrible price. In the early morning hours of October 16, 2002, the Dawson family’s home was firebombed by a local drug dealer in retaliation. The bombing claimed the lives of Angela, Carnell, and all five of the Dawson children.

More recently, in January of this year, Harwood Community Association president Edna McAbier was the target of another firebombing for her involvement in reporting drug dealing. Ms. McAbier has since moved out of her home and five of the men suspected of the crime have been indicted by a federal grand jury for witness tampering, conspiracy to commit witness tampering and use of a firearm in the commission of a crime.

Crimes of this nature are not confined to cities like Baltimore – they affect suburban and rural areas, too. In January of this year, 10 year-old Katlyn Collman of Crothersville, Indiana was abducted and killed. Her drowned body was found five days later in a nearby creek, her little hands tied tightly behind her back. Authorities believe that Katie was murdered to prevent her from telling others about methamphetamine labs she saw in her neighborhood.

These horrible crimes illustrate the dangers faced by honest citizens when they seek to improve their neighborhoods and the lives of their families. These crimes, however, have also led local communities and federal authorities to find ways to protect people like the Dawsons from retaliation by drug dealers and other criminals. The federal Drug Czar, John Walters, and other officials and Members of Congress have also stepped forward to find ways to assist state and local authorities in this effort.

In response to the Dawson murders, Mr. Cummings introduced H.R. 812, the Dawson Family Community Protection Act. I strongly support this bill as a cosponsor. It directs at least \$1 million in funds for the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program to be spent on neighborhood safety measures, including the protection of potential witnesses and the operation of a toll-free telephone hotline for use by the public to provide information about illegal drug-related activities. During the last Congress, the House passed this bill as part of the legislative reauthorization of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Regrettably that bill did not pass the Senate, but we are hopeful that it can be passed this year.

We are holding this hearing to continue our broad-ranging and open discussion of these pressing issues and potential solutions. We are pleased to be joined by the Lieutenant Governor of Maryland, Mr. Michael Steele, and the Mayor of Baltimore, Mr. Martin O'Malley, who have taken the time out of their very busy schedules to discuss this problem. We also welcome Mr. Floyd O. Pond, Assistant Director of the Washington-Baltimore High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, administered by ONDCP.

It is equally important for us to talk to the state and local law enforcement agencies that do so much to combat drug trafficking on the streets. We are therefore pleased to be joined by Lt. Craig Bowers from the Baltimore County Police Department, as well as Ms. Patricia Jessamy, State Attorney for the City of Baltimore.

Finally, we always need to hear from private and faith-based organizations that dedicate themselves to educating young people about the dangers of drug abuse, and providing treatment to those burdened by drug addiction. We welcome Judge Kenneth Johnson, Former Associate Judge, Baltimore City Circuit Court; Mr. David Wright, President of the Charles Village Community Benefits District, and Mr. Ricky P., a resident of West Baltimore. We thank everyone for taking the time to join us today, and we look forward to your testimony.